Reexamining Complex Operations

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Background

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Are We on the Right Path?

- We continue to struggle both conceptually and practically when addressing complex operations.
- Our military currently is perceived to be conducting “non-traditional missions”- but what does that mean?
- We are building civil agency capacities and creating an “interagency process”- but to do what?
- We have developed clear presumptions about complex operations- but are they accurate?

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Methodology

- Much current analysis has been narrow and based on Iraq, Afghanistan, and one or two historical cases.

- Examined nearly 100 operations and nearly 30 doctrines in search of common threads.
  - Scope: 20th Century from 1916 to today.
  - Included Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa.
  - Identified recurring traits.
  - Searched for generalizations, not immutable laws.

- Used comparative analysis and descriptive statistics to identify patterns of how complex operations have been conducted (and what they achieved).

Complex Operations: What Are We Talking About?

An integrated set of political, economic, social, and security measures intended to end and prevent the recurrence of armed violence, create legitimate and effective political, economic, and social structures, and resolve the underlying causes of a conflict in order to establish and sustain the conditions necessary for lasting stability.

Complex Operations By Another Name…

- Small Wars
- Irregular Warfare
- Unconventional Warfare
- Asymmetric Warfare
- Low Intensity Conflict
- MOOTW
- Peace Operations
- Countering Irregular Threats
- Counterinsurgency
- Stability Operations
- Nation-Building
- Reconstruction Operations
- Foreign Internal Defense
- Counterguerrilla Operations

The differences are largely semantic and based on institutional biases rather than strategic realities.

Complex Conflicts

What Are We Talking About?

Protracted violent conflicts in which one or more groups seek to overthrow or fundamentally change the political and social order of a state or region through the use of sustained violence, subversion, social disruption, and political action.

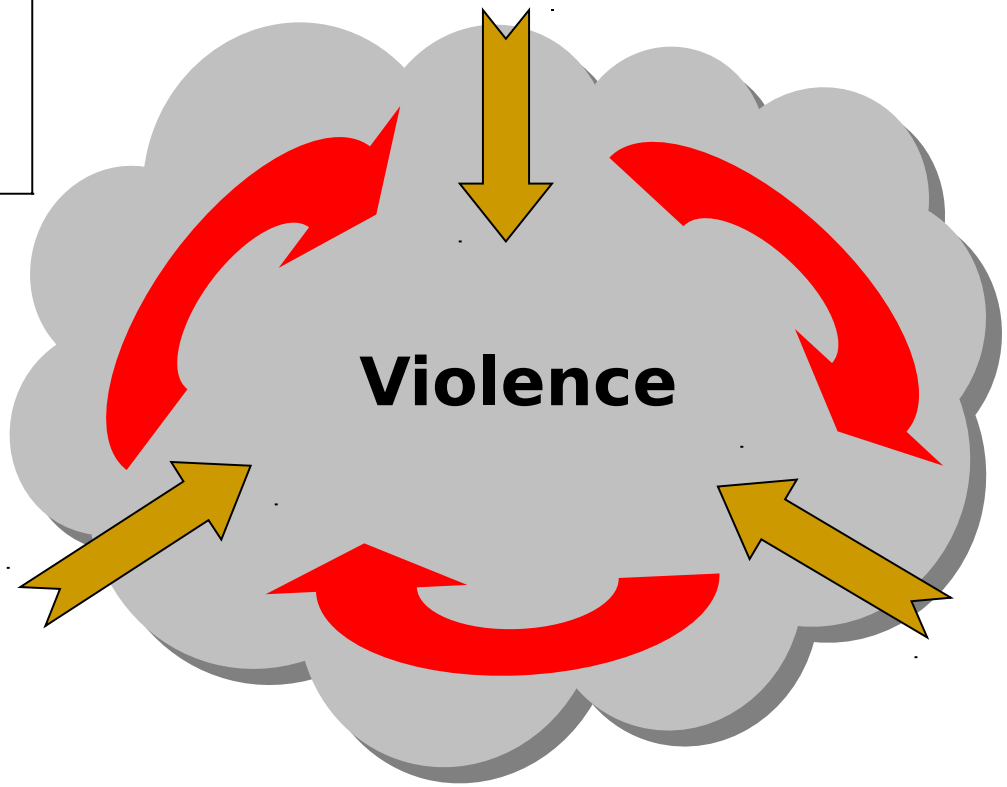
Complex Conflicts

- **Behaviors**
  - Characterized by violence or threats of violence
  - Actions threaten basic needs or vital interests of groups
- **Structures**
  - Structures usually favor and separate groups and individuals
  - Provide few alternatives to violence
  - Basic needs and vital interests of groups are not protected
- **Beliefs**
  - Negative and exclusive worldviews and perceptions reinforce or are reinforced by behaviors and structures
  - Groups view violence as the only or most effective option
  - Basic needs and vital interests are perceived as being threatened

Complex Conflicts

Complex interaction of structures, beliefs, and actions that leads to violence, especially during political, economic, and social instability.

Exclusive Beliefs
Religion
Ethno-nationalism
Competing Worldviews
Hatreds and Prejudices
Perceptions



Illegitimate Structures
Urbanization
Weak Governance
Factionalism
Social Classes
Poverty
Modernization
Poverty
Foreign Occupation

Intolerable Actions
State Violence
Deprivation
Repression
Corruption
Discrimination
Crime
Terrorism
Insurgency
Foreign Intervention

When Conflict Succeeded…

- Insurgencies and uprisings succeeded in achieving their goals in nearly 25% of the cases; partially succeeded in 16%
- Underlying causes were most often associated with identities (ethno-nationalism, cultural identity, religion).
- In cases of outside intervention, most ended with a settlement in which an intervening power withdrew; following which the violence resumed.
- Success took <u>in excess of 8 years.</u>

Successful Conflict Strategy

- Exploited deep-seated and often intractable issues to gain legitimacy.
- Undermined the opposition through ideology and intimidation.
- Employed unconstrained, but purposeful, violence to create and sustain insecurity and instability.
- Conducted protracted paramilitary, political, economic, and social warfare to wear down the enemy.
- Controlled vital areas or denied them to the opposition to gain strength or weaken the opposition.

Key Conclusions

- Violence was a symptom, not a cause
  - Violence almost always had purpose.
  - Terrorism was a tactic, not a strategy.
- The conflict reflected valid underlying causes
  - Do not confuse extremism with illegitimate causes.
  - Failure to address causes escalated violence and unrest.
- Conflicts were not about “winning hearts and minds”
  - Most of the population just wanted to survive!
  - Successful insurgencies and uprisings often became repressive regimes.
- Success was achieved by delegitimizing and isolating the ruling elite.

Complex Operations

Complex Operations: Success

- **Behaviors**
  - No longer characterized by violence
  - Actions do not threaten basic needs or vital interests
- **Structures**
  - Address the conditions that framed the conflict
  - Provide alternatives to violence
  - Basic needs and vital interests are protected
- **Beliefs**
  - View the behaviors and structures as legitimate
  - No longer view violence as a primary or preferred option
  - Basic needs and vital interests seen as protected

Complex Operations

Transformed Beliefs
- Gained Legitimacy
- Secured Identities
- Changed Worldviews
- Reconciled Factions

Reformed Structures
- Established Effective Governance
- Rebuilt Infrastructure
- Sustained Development
- Shifted Power

Changed Behaviors
- Stopped Violence
- Restored Stability
- Mitigated Effects
- Removed Extremists

1) **Violence effectively managed**
2) **Structures non-violently address the causes of conflict**
3) **Groups have transformed how they view the conflict and its resolution**

When Complex Operations Succeeded…

- Two general strategic paths taken by those trying to establish peace.
  - Military defeat of those committing the violence
  - Resolve underlying causes of the violence
- Strategies that primarily sought to defeat an enemy either failed or resulted in repression and occupation.
- Strategies that integrated political, social, economic, and security measures and addressed underlying causes and beliefs usually resulted in lasting (long-term) stability.
- Success required more than ten years of significant effort; the decisive point normally occurred about year 3 to 5.

Successful Strategy

- Redefine success: resolve the conflict rather than win the fight.
  - Stopping the violence is only one part of the problem.
  - Recognize and solve the underlying causes.
  - Success often means giving groups what they demand.
  - Sometimes you have to deal with the “enemy”.

- To achieve a lasting outcome, execute an integrated three-dimensional strategy:
  - Restore and maintain stability.
  - Build effective security, political, economic, and social structures.
  - Change the underlying conditions and attitudes.

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Complex Operations Tasks

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Operational Traits

- Identity conflicts proved to be the most difficult; they often turned out badly.
- Civil and factional conflicts (usually over political or economic issues) were the easiest to manage and eventually resolve.
- Conflicts that involved unrest and insurgencies most often resulted in positive outcomes.
- Intervening into identity and factional conflicts tended to cause escalation.
- Violence decreased initially, then increased over time.

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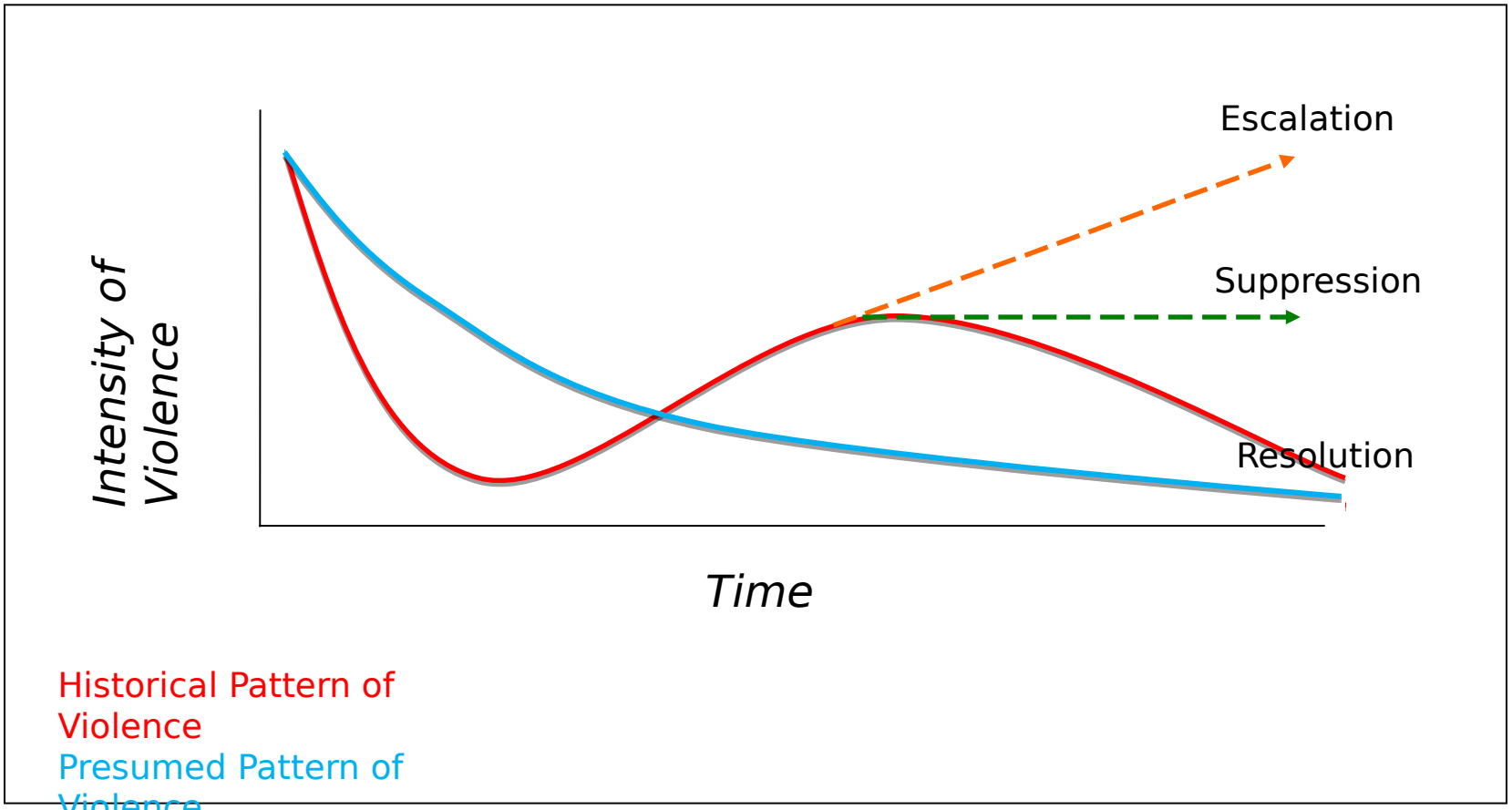
Patterns of Violence



Operational Traits

- External military forces usually remained long after initial opposition or fighting ended.
- The concept of ‘overwhelming force’ was nuanced- usually meant at the point of application.
- The concept of ‘limited force’ was much more stringent in its application, and rarely proved effective.
- Peacekeeping concepts of ‘impartiality’ and ‘consensus’ were rarely effective.
- Military forces conducted nearly all tasks: both military and civil.
- Transition between military forces and civil authorities took two distinct paths.

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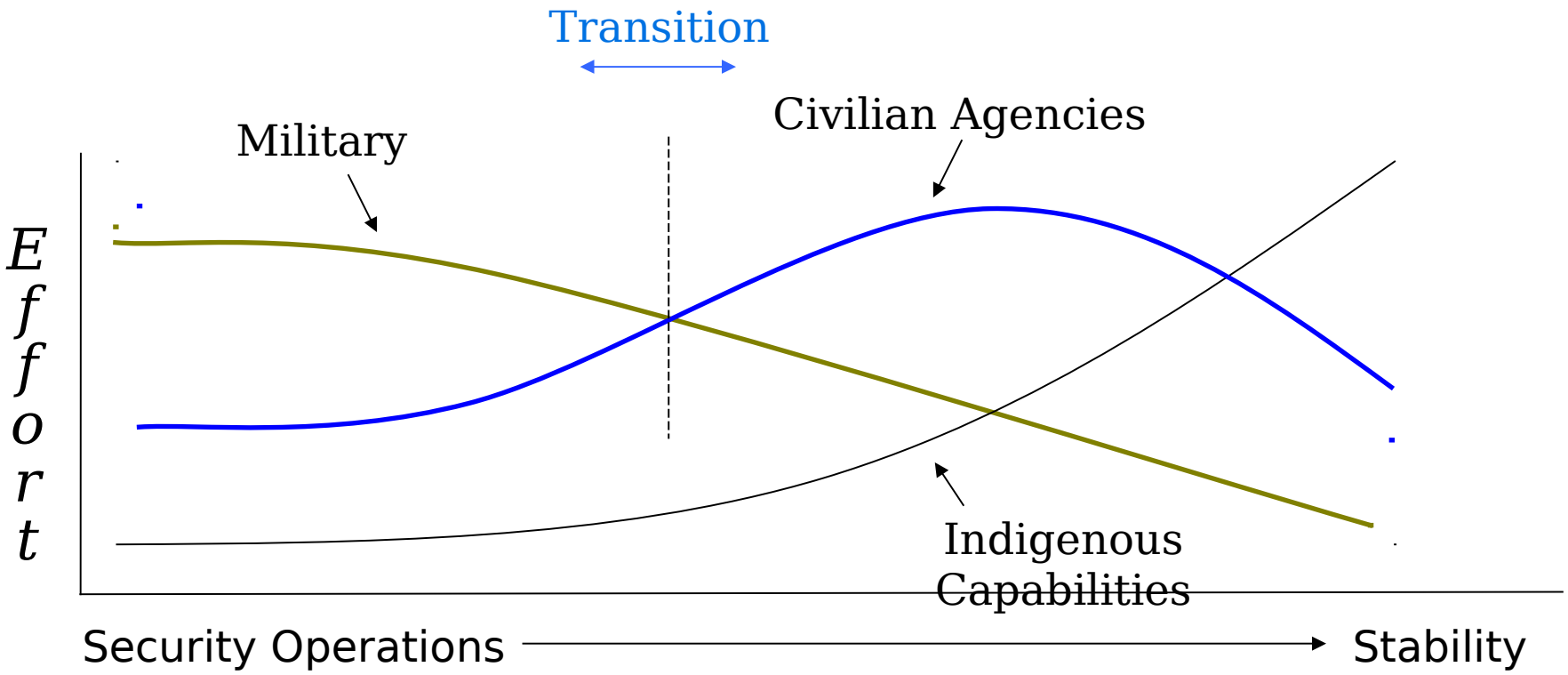
The Civil-Military Transition

Current Presumption

- Complex operations require civilian capacities, with the military in support.
- The transition is from military forces to international civil agencies.
- Once the security situation allows, military forces withdraw, retaining only a limited security and training capability.
- Civil agencies transition governance and development to indigenous institutions as they become capable of assuming them.
- Historically, this has been the UN and, to some extent, the European model.

Prevailing Concept



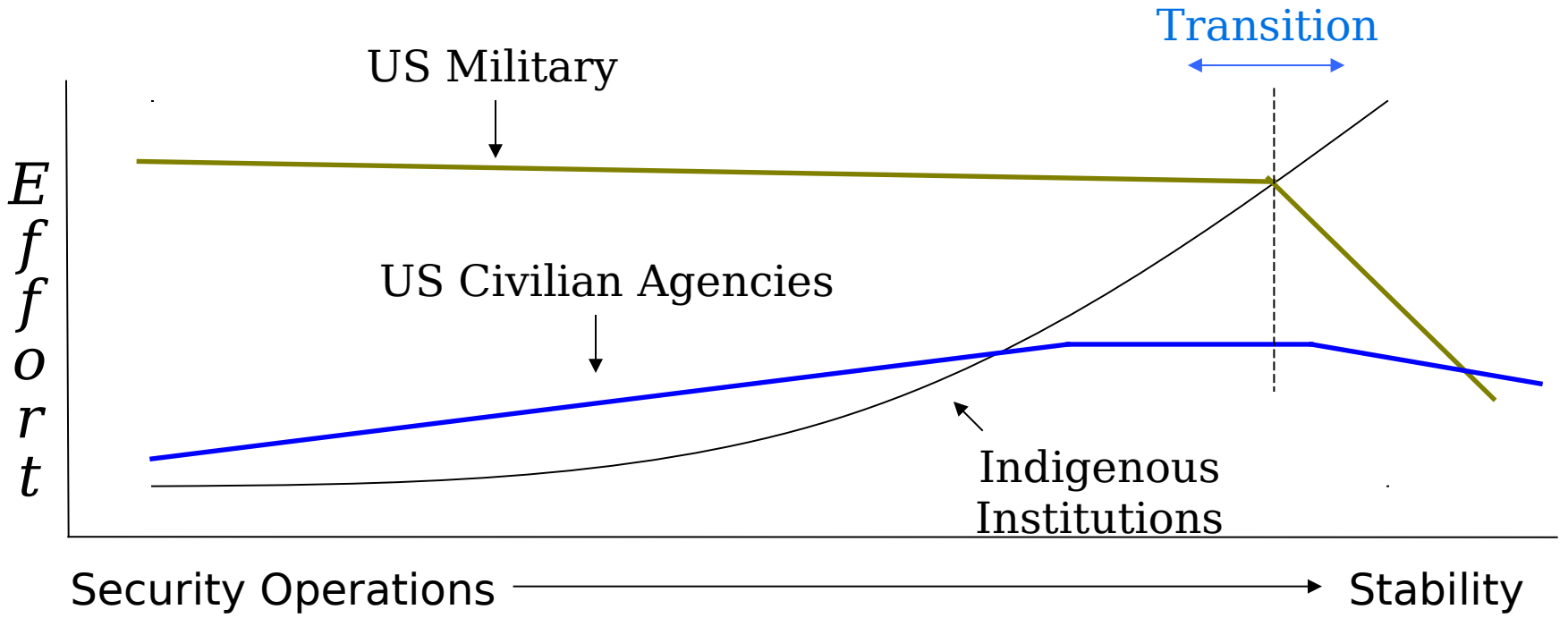
Military Transitions to Civilian Agencies

Adapted from Conrad Crane, USAMHI

Historical Reality

- Military forces conducted the full spectrum of counterinsurgency tasks; advised and supported by civil agencies and expertise.
- The transition was from military forces to indigenous institutions, not to US or other civil agencies.
- Civil agencies provide policy guidance and expertise, first to military forces, then to indigenous institutions.
- The US has rarely fielded a robust civil capability for administering or governing other states or regions.
- The US historically rejected establishing large civilian presence; it smacks of colonialism

Historical Reality



Military Transitions to Indigenous Authorities

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Implications if History is Right

- **Military forces must capable of**:
  - Conducting full spectrum operations- from combat to reconciliation.
  - Assuming and then fostering governance.
  - Identifying and then addressing the underlying causes of conflicts.
  - Staying for several years.

- **Success in complex operations will be**:
  - Extended duration (years not months).
  - Highly decentralized and manpower intensive
  - Heavily dependent on continuous presence.
  - Reliant on a military that can do far more than fight.

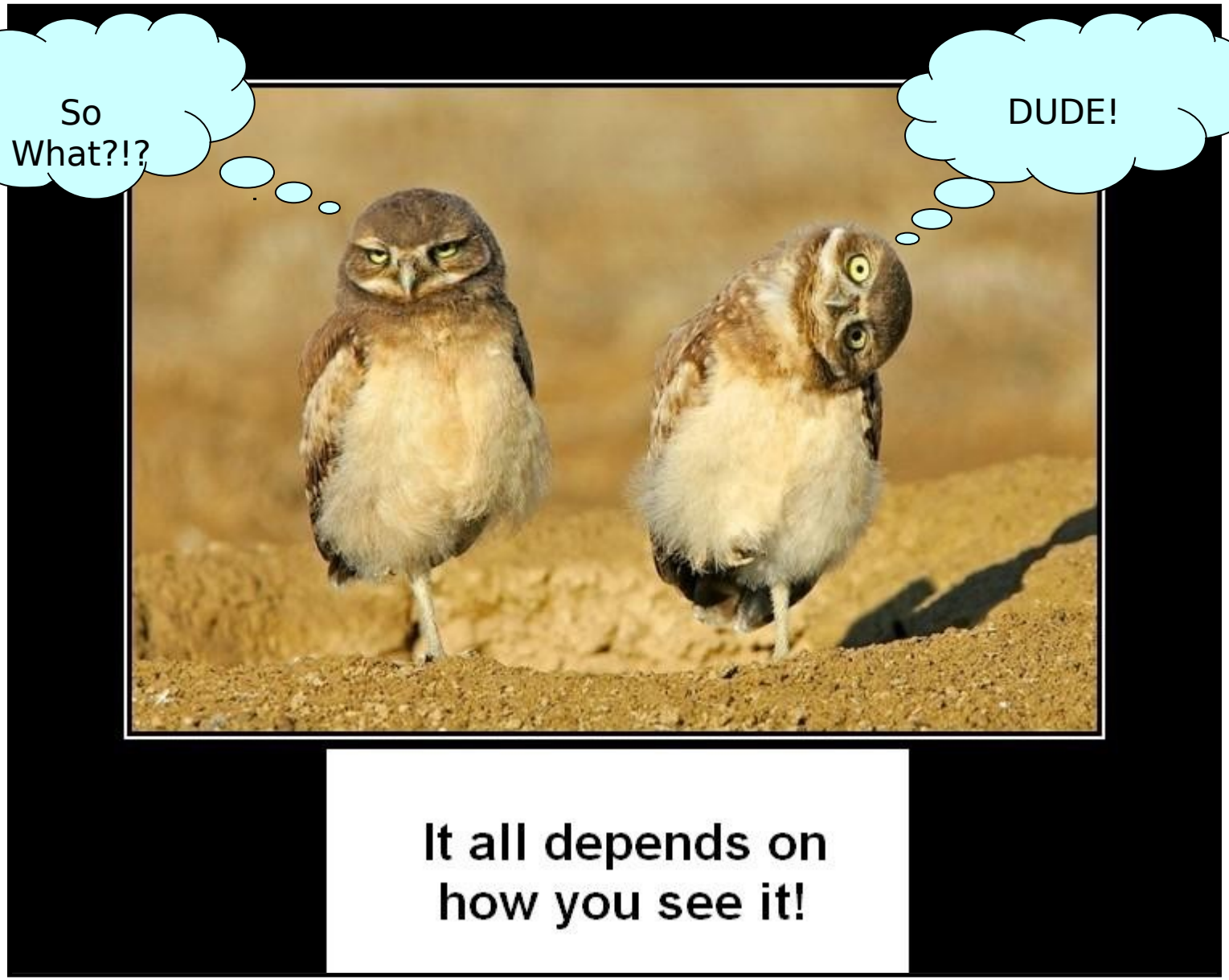
Implications for the 'Interagency'

- Military and civil tasks cannot be separated; the military usually assumes de facto responsibility for them all, especially in conflict and post-conflict situations
- US civil agencies have not "traditionally" carried out the civil tasks; they provided policy guidance and expertise.
- Security concerns and scope of effort precluded large-scale civilian presence.
- US anti-colonial tradition prohibited development of civilian capacity to govern other countries.
- 'Interagency' provided guidance, advice, and some funding, but they have not replaced military forces.

The question is not one of roles and missions, it is one of transition. This fundamental strategic and conceptual question has not been addressed.

Final Points

- No two conflicts are exactly alike, but they do exhibit common traits.
- Three critical dimensions are actions, structures, and beliefs. Think three-dimensionally!
- Address the underlying causes in order to succeed; “victory” is not the objective.
- The military will be required to conduct all tasks – think civil, not civilian.
- Focus on transition, not roles and missions.


So What?!?
DUDE!
It all depends on how you see it!